

## **Missing You** by **theamiableanachronism**

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**Summary:** In which El is stuck at home with a cold missing Mike while Mike is miles away missing her.

## Missing You

"Of all the weeks you have to be out of town," El gasped as a sneeze rocketed out of her stuffed-up nose and into her 354th Kleenex. She heard Mike chuckle on the other end of the line from the phone cradled between her shoulder and her ear.

"You okay?" he asked, his voice equal parts gentle concern and amusement.

El sniffed and set the base of the phone in her lap. "I'm fine. I just... wish you were here. It would make it easier."

"I know," Mike said, his voice softening. "Sorry I can't be there. But it's only a few more days and then I'll be home."

That would have been more comforting to hear if these first few days hadn't already felt like a month, but she smiled anyway; he sounded just as eager to see her as she was to see him.

She swiped Kleenex #355 under her raw nose. "How is the symposium going?"

She could see him shrug in the pause that followed. "It's all right. Stuff everybody's heard before. Nothing groundbreaking."

"Aw."

"Yeah. But, I mean, I've gotten to meet some really cool people. Did I tell you I got to talk to one of the project scientists for Voyager?"

"Ed Stone?"

"Oh. I did already tell you." He laughed. "Well, I promise I'll have something new to tell you when I get home."

"Three more days," she said.

"What, do you have a countdown going?" Mike asked, a smile in his voice.

El looked at the calendar on her wall with Saturday circled in three different colors of ink and "MIKE'S HOME" written in letters as big as the tiny space would allow.

"Yes," she said, adding impishly, "Don't you?"

"Of course," he said, sounded offended by the very thought that he wouldn't be counting the days. El rolled her eyes at how quickly she blushed. It wasn't like they were tiny thirteen years old anymore. They were both officially adults now, but it still made her heart leap knowing there was someone out there who missed her when she wasn't there. And that that someone was her Mike.

"Hey, I've got to go," her Mike said abruptly. "I'll call you later, okay?"

El blew her nose. "Okay. Talk to you later."

"Love you."

"Love you too."

She paused, waiting to hear the click on the other end of the line, but apparently Mike was doing the same.

"I thought you said you had to go," El grinned into the receiver.

"Okay, okay, I'm going!" She heard that teasing smile and waited through the final pause that lasted about a second before she heard him hang up. Gingerly, she followed suit, letting the receiver roll off her fingers one by one until it fell into the cradle.

Damn, she missed him.

She looked around the living room. A muted episode of Seinfeld on the tiny tv set in her room cut to a commercial for, ironically, Kleenex. She snorted and blinked, sending balls of crumpled kleenex littered on the floor sailing into the wastebasket. She curled deeper into her fleece blanket and pulled an edge over the top of her head. The effects of her cold medicine were finally starting to kick in and her eyelids felt like they each weighed a hundred pounds. She let her head loll onto the back of the couch. She took a deep breath, letting her chest rise and fall slowly as sleep began to claim her. She thought

of Sarah covering her shift at the library for the past two days, of Mike stuck at a symposium in Illinois with his MIT science club trying to gather new information for his thesis, of an Ed Stone who looked like a taller, balder Mr. Clarke riding a shuttle through space...

She opened her eyes. The fever must have been setting in.

She got up from her bed, dragging the blanket with her and moving through the house like a misplaced shepherd. Once she got to the kitchen, she filled a cup with cold water from the sink and guzzled the whole thing down in seconds. She regarded the empty glass. So it was dehydration then.

A sound from the entryway drew her attention, a sound that sounded suspiciously like the sound of a certain pair of keys turning in the lock. The door opened and from around the corner of the wall separating the kitchen from the entryway came the confirmation that not only was she dehydrated and probably feverish, she was also completely dreaming.

Mike smiled at the confused look on her face as she stood there, frozen, an empty glass in her hand.

"You're supposed to be in Illinois!"

Mike's smile only widened. "I *was* in Illinois!"

El blinked, breaking her paralysis, and set her glass on the counter before walking up to Mike, who still had his two suitcases in his hands. He had a twinkle in his dark eyes as he looked down at her from his whole-head-taller height.

"Where were you calling from just now?"

"Melvald's," Mike replied, jerking his head in the general direction of downtown Hawkins.

El stared up at her Mike, her stupid *stupid* Mike, and hid the growing smile on her face by throwing her arms around him. He quickly responded, pulling her close and resting his head on top of her messy hair. Oh she had missed this. Even three days without it was too

much. But she pulled away just enough to look, concerned, into his face.

"But what about the symposium?"

"It was only three days."

"You said it was a week!"

"It was! Originally! But they ended early."

El groaned and Mike laughed. "Hey, I told you I'd have something new to tell you when I got home!"

El gently punched his shoulder. "You're so stupid."

"I missed you too."

She rolled her eyes and stood on the tips of her toes to plant a kiss on his cheek. "I'm glad you're home."

He returned the kiss on her lips and she gasped. "No, I'm still contagious!"

His face shifted into a comically dramatic expression of shock. "Oh no! You mean now we'll have to stay home *together*?" He grinned and El punched him again, harder so that he winced.

"Michael Wheeler, you are so. Stupid!"

"I love you too, El Wheeler. Now where's the cold medicine?"